

A CELEBRATED
L E T T E R
F R O M
JOHN WILKES, ESQ.

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A CELEBRATED
L E T T E R,
SENT FROM
JOHN WILKES, Esq. at PARIS,
TO THE
ELECTORS OF AYLESBURY,
IN THE YEAR 1764.

THE SECOND EDITION.



L O N D O N:
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THE
J. F. T. E.
JOHN WILKES, Esq., of PARIS,
TO THE
ELECTORS OF AYDESSA,
IN THE YEAR 1792.
THE SECOND EDITION.

R67211



*A Letter from John Wilkes, Esq.
to the Electors of Aylesbury.
Wrote and sent in the Year 1764.*

GENTLEMEN,



H E very honourable,
unanimous, and repeated
Marks of Esteem you con-
ferred on me by commit-
ting to my Trust your Li-
berty, Safety, Property, and all those glo-
rious Privileges, which are your Birth-
right, as Englishmen, entitle you to my
warmest Thanks, and to the highest Tri-
bute of Gratitude my Heart can pay.
Yet, in the peculiar Circumstances of my
B Case,

Case, I think that I ought not at present to rest contented with thanking you. I have always found a true Pleasure in submitting to you my Parliamentary Conduct. It is now more particularly my Duty; and when I reflect on the real Importance and interesting Nature of those great Events, in which, as your Representative, I have been more immediately concerned, I am exceedingly anxious not barely to justify myself, but to obtain the Sanction of your Approbation. It has ever been my Ambition to approve myself worthy of the Choice you have more than once made of me as your Deputy to the great Council of the Nation, with an Unanimity equally honourable and endearing. The Consciousness of having faithfully discharged my Trust, of having acted an upright and steady Part in Parliament, as well as in the most arduous Circumstances, makes me dare to hope, that you will continue to me what I most value, the good Opinion and Friendship of my worthy Constituents.

stituents. Having the Happiness of being born in a Country, where the Name of *Vassal* is unknown, where MAGNA CHARTA is the Inheritance of the Subject, I have endeavoured to support and merit those Privileges, to which my Birth gave me the clearest Right. Secure as I am of fully justifying my Conduct, could I persuade myself that I have acted up to the sacred Ideas of Liberty, which warm the Hearts, and inspire the Actions of my Countrymen, I should not, under all the Variety of the most unjust and cruel Persecutions, be quite unhappy.

The various Charges brought against me may be reduced to two Heads. The one is of a publick the other of a private Nature. The first is grounded on the political Paper of the *North Briton*, No. 45: The other respects a small Part of a ludicrous Poem, which was stolen out of my House. The two Accusations are only so far connected, that I am convinced, there is not a Man in England who be-

lieves, that if the *First* had not appeared, the *Second* would ever have been called in Question.

The first Charge is, that *The North Briton* No. 45, is a FALSE Libel.

On my Trial before Lord Mansfield, the Word FALSE was omitted in the Indictment,

The Word FALSE is not to be found among the various Epithets applied to this Paper, in either of the Warrants issued by Lord Halifax.

By the first Warrant, under which I was apprehended, *The North Briton*, No. 45, was denominated a TREASONABLE Paper. In the second, by which I was committed to the Tower, that Word too was omitted; so that the greatest Enemies of this Paper seem to give

give up its being either FALSE or
TREASONABLE. * * *

* * *

It is remarkable that the Epithet
TRAITEROUS is given to *Insurrection*,
as the *supposed* Consequence of a *supposed*
Libel; whereas the Scots, who appeared
in open Rebellion so lately as 1745, were
in the weekly Writings against the *North*
Briton, (published under the Patronage
of the Scottish Minister, and *paid for by*
him out of the ———) only termed
Insurgents, who defeated regular Forces.
Yet in Fact no *Insurrection of any*
Kind ever did, or could follow from this
Publication, even in those Parts of the
Kingdom so lately subjected to all the
Insolence and Cruelty of the most despi-
cable of our Species, the mean, petty
Exciseman. This is the strongest Case
which can possibly be put. The EX-
CISE is the most abhorred Monster,
which ever sprung from arbitrary Power,
and the new Mode of it is spoken of
through this Paper as the greatest Griev-
ance

ance on the Subject; yet, even in this Case, Obedience to the *Laws* and all lawful Authority is strictly enjoined, and no Opposition but what is consistent with the *Laws* and the *Constitution* is allowed. The words are very *temperate, cautious, and well guarded*. 'Every *LEGAL Attempt of a contrary Tendency to the Spirit of Concord will be deemed a justifiable Resistance, warranted by the Spirit of the English Constitution.*' Is this withdrawing the People from their Obedience to the LAWS of the Realm? Is Resistance recommended, but expressly only so far as it is strictly LEGAL? Let the impartial Public determine; whether this is the Language of SEDITION, or can have the least Tendency to excite TRAITEROUS Insurrections. * *

* * * *

The general Charge that the *North Briton*, No. 45, is a LIBEL, scarcely deserves

deserves an Answer, because the Term is vague, and still remains undefined by our Law. Every man applies it to what he dislikes. A spirited *Satire* will be deemed a *Libel* by a *wicked Minister*, and by a *corrupt Judge*, who feel, or who dread the Lash.

The *North Briton* did not suffer the Public to be misled. He acknowledged no *privileged Vehicle of Fallacy*. He considered the *Liberty of the Press* as the Bulwark of all our Liberties, as instituted to open the Eyes of the People; and he seems to have thought it the Duty of a political Writer to follow *Truth* wherever it leads. In this Behalf I would ask even Lord Mansfield, *Can TRUTH be a LIBEL? Is it so in the King's Bench?*

This unlucky Paper is likewise said, and by the Hirelings of the Ministry it is always

always in private charge, with PERSONAL Disrespect to the King. It is however most certain that not a single Word *personally* disrespectful to his Majesty is to be found in any Part of it. On the contrary, the Sovereign is mentioned not only in Terms of Decency, but with that Regard and Reverence which is due from a good Subject to a good King — ‘ *a Prince of so many great and amiable Qualities, whom England truly reveres* — *The personal Character of our present amiable Sovereign makes us easy and happy that so great a Power is lodged in such Hands.* * * *

* * * * *

The Author of that Paper, so far from making any *personal* Attack on his Sovereign, has even vindicated him *personally* from some of the late Measures, which were so severely censured by the judicious and unbiassed Public. He exclaims with an honest Indignation, ‘ *What a Shame was it to see the Security of this Country, in Point of Military Force,* com-

* complimented away, CONTRARY
 * TO THE OPINION OF ROYALTY
 * ITSELF, and sacrificed to the Preju-
 * dices, and to the Ignorance of a Set of
 * People, the most unfit, from every Con-
 * sideration, to be consulted on a Matter
 * relative to the Security of the House of
 * Hanover ? * *

* * * * *
 The Minister is indeed every where
 treated with the Contempt and Indigna-
 tion he has merited, but he is ever care-
 fully distinguished from the Sovereign.
 Every Kingdom in the World has, in
 its Turn, found Occasion to lament, that
 Princes of the best Intentions have been
 deceived and misled by wicked and de-
 signing Ministers and Favourites. It has
 likewise, in most Countries, been the
 Fate of the few daring Patriots, who have
 honestly endeavoured to undeceive their
 Sovereign, to feel the heaviest Marks of
 his Displeasure. It is however I think
 rather wonderful among us, even in these
 Times, that a Paper, which contains the
 C most

most dutiful Expressions of Regard to his Majesty, should be treated with such unusual Severity, and yet that so many other Publications of the same Date, full of the most deadly Venom, should pass totally unregarded. Some of these Papers contained the most opprobrious Reflections on that true Patron of Liberty, the *late King*, whose Memory is embalmed with the Tears of Englishmen, while his Ashes are rudely trampled upon by others, whom his godlike Attribute, of Mercy had pardoned the Crime of unprovoked Rebellion. Others were full of the most indecent Abuse on our great Protestant Ally, the King of Prussia, on the near Relation of his present Majesty, who ^{was} merited so highly of the Nation by fixing the Crown in the House of Hanover; on the staunchest Friends of Freedom, the City of London; and on the first Characters among us. Yet all these Papers have passed uncensured by Ministers, Secretaries, and by the two *Houses of Parliament*.

There

There only remains one other Charge,

* * * * *

Under the *arbitrary Stuarts*, when our more than *Roman* Senates dared to bring *Truth* to the Foot of the Throne, and made the trembling Tyrant to obey her sacred Voice; the Nation was in Love with Parliaments, because they were the steady Friends of Liberty, and never met but in Favour of the Subject to redress real Grievances.

* * * * *

I have thus, Gentlemen, gone through all the Objections made against this Paper

* * * * *

the Treatment I experienced, as the *supposed* Author * * * * * Orders were given by the deceased Secretary of State, *to drag me out of my Bed at Midnight*. A good deal of Humanity, and some Share of Timidity, prevented the Execution of such———Commands. I was made a Prisoner in my own House by several of the King's Messengers, who

only produced a *General Warrant*, issued without Oath, neither naming nor describing me. I therefore refused to obey a Warrant, which I knew to be illegal. I was, however, by Violence, carried before the Earls of Egremont and Halifax, who thought it worth their while to ask me a tolerable Number of plain Questions, to not one of which I thought it worth my while to give a plain Answer. It is no small Satisfaction to me now to know, that I have not a Friend in the World, who wishes a single Word *unsaid* by me in the critical Moment of that Examination. I informed their Lordships of the Orders actually given by the *Court of Common Pleas* for my *Habeas Corpus*, notwithstanding which I was committed to the Tower, the Custody of me shifted into other Hands, and that Act for the Liberty of the Subject eluded. Although the Offence of which I stood accused, was undoubtedly *bailable*; yet for three Days every Person was refused Admittance to me; and the Governor

vernor was obliged to treat me in a Manner very different from the great Humanity of his Nature, for he had received Orders to consider me a *close* Prisoner. I rejoice that I can say, I am the only Instance of such rigorous Treatment since the Accession of the Mild House of Brunswic, although the Tower has twice been crowded even with Rebels from the Northern Parts of the Island; and therefore I shall continue to regret the

Policy, of conferring on
Scotsmen ALL the Governments of the few Conquests, not tamely given up by the SCOTTISH Minister; Conquests won by the Valour of the united Forces of England, Scotland, and Ireland. While I suffered this harsh Confinement, my House in Great George-street was plundered, all my papers were seized, and some of a very *nice* and *delicate* Nature, not bearing the most distant Relation to the Affairs of Government, were divulged.

When I was brought before the *Common Pleas*, I pleaded the Cause of *universal Liberty*. It was not the Cause of Peers and Gentleman only, but of *all the middling and inferior Class of People, who stand most in Need of Protection*, which I observed was, on that Day, the great Question before the Court. I was discharged from Imprisonment by the unanimous Sentence of my Judges, without giving any Bail or Security. On the first Day of the Meeting of Parliament I humbly submitted my Grievances to the *House of Commons*, as they were chosen to be the Guardians of the Liberties of the People against the Despotism of Ministers. I likewise voluntary entered my Appearance to the Actions brought at Law against me, as soon as I knew the Determination of the *Majority*, that all the Irregularities against me should be justified, and that no *Privilege* should be allowed

allowed *in my Case*, even as to the Mode of Proceeding, which was the most harsh the Rancour of Party could devise.

Plurima defunt.

I now proceed to the other Charge brought against me, which respects an idle Poem, called an ESSAY ON WOMAN, and a few other detached Verses. If so much had not been said on this Subject, I should be superior to entering upon any Justification of myself, because I will always maintain the Right of private Opinion in its fullest Extent, when it is not followed by giving any open, public Offence to any Establishment, or indeed to any Individual. The Crime commences from thence, and the Magistrate has a Right to interpose, and even to punish outrageous and indecent Attacks on what any Community has decreed to be sacred. Not only the Rules
of

of good Breeding, but the Laws of Society are then infringed. In my own Closet I had a Right to examine, and even to try by the keen Edge of Ridicule, any Opinions I pleased. If I have laughed pretty freely at the glaring Absurdities of

a Creed which our great Tillotson WISHED THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND WAS FAIRLY RID OF, it was in private I laughed

I gave however no Offence to any one Individual of the Community. The Fact is, that after the Affair of the NORTH BRITON

bribed one of my Servants to *steal* a Part of the ESSAY ON WOMAN, and the other Pieces out of my House. Not quite a *Fourth* Part of the Volume had been printed at my own private Press. The Work had been discontinued for several Months before I had the least Knowledge of the Theft. Of that *Fourth* Part

Part only twelve Copies were worked off, and I never gave one of those Copies to any Friend. In this infamous Manner did ——— get Possession of this new Subject of Accusation, and, except in the Case of Algernon Sidney, of this new Species of Crime; for a Stuart only could make the Refinement in Tyranny of ransacking and robbing the Recesses of Closets and Studies, in order to convert *private Amusements* into *State Crimes*. After the Servant had been bribed to commit the Theft in his Master's House, the most abandoned Man of the Age *

* * * * *
 was bribed to make a Complaint * *
 * * that I had PUBLISHED
 an infamous *Poem*, which no Man there
 had ever seen. It was read before *

* * * * * *excellent*
Judges of Wit and Poetry, * * *

* * * * *
 The neat, prim, smirking *Chaplain* of
 that Babe of Grace, that gude *Cbeeld* of
 the prudish *Kirk* of *Scotland*, the *

D

was

was highly offended at my having made an *Essay on Woman*. His *Nature* could not forgive me that INEFFABLE Crime, and *his own Conduct* did not afford me the Shadow of an Apology. In great Wrath he drew his Grey Goose-Quill against me. The *pious Peer* caught the Alarm, and they both poured forth most woeful Lamentations, their tender Hearts overwhelmed with *Grief*, or as the Chaplain, who held the Pen, said, with GRIEF OF GRIEFS. He proceeded to make very unfair Extracts, and afterwards to *be-note* them in the foulest Manner. The most vile Blasphemies were forged, and published as Part of a Work, which in Reality contained nothing but

a few Portraits drawn warm from Life, with the too high Colouring of youthful Fancy, and two or three Descriptions, perhaps too luscious, which though NATURE and WOMAN might pardon, a *Kidgel* and a ——— could not fail to condemn.

I have

I have now, Gentlemen, gone through all the Objections which have been made to my Conduct in a *publick* Capacity. My Enemies finding that I was invulnerable, where they pointed their most envenomed Darts, afterwards attempted to assassinate my private Character, and propagated an infinite Variety of groundless Calumnies against me. I have generally treated these with the Contempt they deserved, from the Certainty that all who knew me, would know that I was incapable of the Things laid to my Charge. A few Falsehoods, advanced with more Boldness than the rest, I was at the Pains to refute. The Winchester Story in particular, because it respected Lord Bute's own Son, and had been ushered to the Publick with the greatest Parade, as well as with all the Impudence of Malice, and Rage of Party, I disproved so fully, that I am sure not the least Shadow of a Doubt remained in any Man's Mind as to my entire Innocence

of that most illiberal Charge. I have lived so long among you, Gentlemen, that I will rest every Thing, respecting me as a private Man, to the Testimony which the Experience of so many Years authorizes you to give, well knowing that true Candour always weighs in the same Balance, Faults and Virtues. The Shades in private Life are darkened by an Enemy, but scarcely seen by a Friend. Besides it is not given to every Man to be as *pious* as Lord —, or as *chaste*, in and out of the Marriage Bed, in all Thought, Word, and Deed, as the —.

A few other Particulars, Gentlemen, deserve to be mentioned, that you may have before you the Whole of my Conduct in these interesting Affairs. Immediately after the late flagrant Breach of the Laws, I thought it my Duty to the Community to commence Actions against all the Persons guilty. I despise the Meanness of attacking only Agents and Deputies. I endeavoured to bring
to

to the Jurisdiction of the Law, the *Principals*, ———, the *two Secretaries of State*. I blush for my Country, when I add, that though I have employed the ablest Gentlemen of the Profession, they have hitherto found it impossible, even to force an Appearance. Lord Egremont died, ———. Lord Halifax lives, *

The judicial Proceeding at my Suit, commenced in the Beginning of May Twelvemonth, and now at the End of October in the present Year, his Lordship has not entred any Appearance, * * *

The *little Offenders* indeed have not escaped. Several *honest Juries* have marked them with Ignominy, and their Guilt has been followed with legal Punishment. But what is of infinitely greater Importance to the Nation, we have heard from the Bench, that GENERAL WARRANTS ARE ABSOLUTELY ILLEGAL. Such a Declaration is now become in the highest Degree interesting
to

to the Subject, because *

* * * *

We owe it likewise to the most upright, independent, and intrepid *Chief Justice* of the *Court of Common Pleas*, that in the Action against the Under Secretary of State, Mr. Wood, THE SEIZURE OF PAPERS, except in Cases of High Treason, has been declared ILLEGAL.

When I reflect on these two most important Determinations in Favour of *Liberty*, the best Cause, and the noblest Stake, for which Men can contend, I congratulate my Free-born Countrymen, and am full of Gratitude, that Heaven inspired me with a Firmness and Fortitude equal to the Conduct of so arduous a Business *

* * * * the Goodness of the Cause supported me; and I never lost Sight of the great Object, which I had from the first in my View, the Preservation of the Rights and Privileges of *Englishmen*. I glory in the Name, and will never forget the Duties

ties resulting from it. Though I am driven into Exile from my dear Country, I shall never cease to love and reverence its Constitution, while it remains free. It will continue my first Ambition to approve myself a faithful Son of England; and I shall always be ready to give my Life a willing Sacrifice to my native Country, and to what it holds most dear, the Security of our invaluable Liberties. While I live, I shall enjoy the Satisfaction of thinking that I have not lived in vain; that the present Age has borne the noblest Testimony to me, and that my Name will pass with Honour to Posterity, for the upright and disinterested Part I have acted, and for my unwearied Endeavours *to protect and secure the Persons, Houses, and Papers of my Fellow Subjects from arbitrary Visits and Seizures.*

I am, Gentlemen,
With much Regard and Affection,
Your most obliged,
And obedient humble Servant,

Paris, Oct. 22, 1754. 64

JOHN WILKES.

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driven into exile from my dear Country,
I shall never cease to love and reverence
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unwearied Endeavours to protect and
secure the Rights, Liberties, and Property
of my Country.

I am, Gentlemen,
With much Regard and Affection,
Your most obliged,
And obedient humble Servant,

JOHN WILKES.